Sleep in Heavenly Peace

Lionel Hartley

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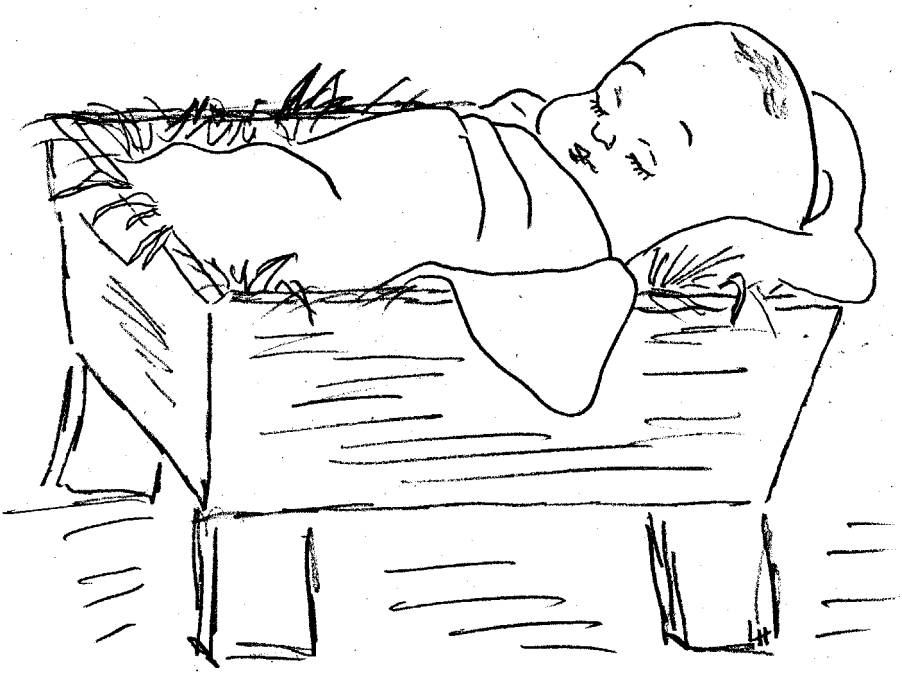

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Chapter 1. O, for Sleep

Psalm 4, "To the chief Musician on Neginoth, A Psalm of David. Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.

2) O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah.

3) But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto him.

4) Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.

5) Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.

6) There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

7) Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.

8) I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety."

Thomas Hood (1799-1845) wrote, "O bed! O bed! Delicious bed! That heaven upon earth to the weary head".

In 1818 Joseph Mohr wrote of the baby Jesus during a certain silent and holy night using these words, "Holy Infant so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace".

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) wrote, "O sleep, O gentle sleep, / Nature's soft nurse! / How have I frighted thee, / That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down / And steep my senses in forgetfulness?"

Elsewhere he wrote, "Sleep ... knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care".

Bob Phillips wrote, "Smile and the world smiles with you; snore and you sleep alone".

I read somewhere that there was an occasion when all the high school coaches in Boise, Idaho, went to a coaches' retreat. To save money, they had to room together in twos.

No one wanted to room with Coach Darryl because he snored so bad. They decide it's not fair to make one of them stay with him the whole time, so

they voted to take turns.

The first coach sleeps with Darryl and comes to breakfast next morning with his hair a mess, eyes all bloodshot. They say, "What happened to you?"

He said, "Man, that Darryl snored so loud, I watched him all night"

The next night it was a different coach's turn. In the morning, same thing — hair all standing up, eyes all bloodshot.

They say, "What happened to you? You look awful!"

He said, "That Darryl shakes the roof. I watched him all night."

The third night was Frank's turn. Frank was a big burly ex-football player-looking type of man's man.

Next morning, he comes to breakfast bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, "Good morning."

They can't believe it! They say, "Frank, what happened?"

He said, "Well, we got ready for bed. I went and tucked Darryl into bed and kissed him good night. He watched me all night long."

Proverbs 3:24, "When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet."

Karen Wingate was having a sleepless night — an evening cup of coffee, her husband's abnormally loud snoring, and details about an upcoming trip were keeping her hopelessly awake.

Even after she slipped into the guest bedroom, she still had trouble. Finally, at 3:15 a.m., Karen crawled back into her own bed, next to a now half-awake husband.

"Honey, I can't sleep," I whispered. "I start to drift off and even dream, but then I wake up with a jerk."

"Wait a minute," my husband said, now fully awake. "I am not a jerk!"

My wife Rosemary is a morning person and her best time for communion with God is an hour or two very early in the morning before she starts her

homemaking for the day.

My morning devotional is brief, like tuning my violin or 'cello before playing it.

However, being a night owl, my best time for prayer, Bible study, inspirational reading and writing is my 4-6 hours of daily devotions just before going to bed.

Consequently, I usually sleep well. Within a few minutes of my head resting on the pillow, I'm sleeping, and according to my Rosemary, I'm snoring.

Even when I am in great pain, I choose not let my feelings keep me down during the day nor worry keep me up during the night.

I remember the words of an anonymous writer who suggested, "If you can't sleep, don't count sheep, talk to the Shepherd."

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Chapter 2. Sleep, What Sleep?

However, many people have trouble sleeping.

Researchers tell us that a new baby in the household typically results in between 400 and 750 hours of lost sleep for parents in the first year.

Some have trouble sleeping because of pain or perhaps something has happened at work, in the family, or their life that keeps them awake thinking, anxious or worried.

Many are especially prone to lying awake if they have been falsely accused or attacked for no good reason, like King David in the psalm that I have just shared.

There's nothing like tension, stress, or worry to keep a person sleepless during the night and restless during the day.

We all will face those things that may cause the heartaches that can lead to anxiety.

How we handle these events will dictate if we

will be uptight in the daytime and upright in the night-time.

God wants us to get our rest! Look with me at Psalm 127.

Psalm 127:1-2 reads, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat — for he grants sleep to those he loves".

There is a lovely Lutheran children's evening hymn in the German language *(Muede bin ich, geh zur Ruh, schliesse meine Aeuglein zu: Vater, lass die Augen dein ueber meinem Bette sein.)* that I would translate like this: "I am very tired. Now I am going to close my eyes. I know that You, my heavenly Father will keep Your's open and that You will watch over me."

John Oxenham wrote, "Thank God for sleep! And, when you cannot sleep, still thank him that you live to lie awake".

Chapter 3. Sleep Solutions

Down through the years King David faced situations that could cause him to lose sleep.

Psalm 3 was written when David was running from his son, Absalom, who had usurped his father's throne. Yet, David was able to sleep. We read about this in Psalm 3.

Psalm 3:1-5, "A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son. Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me.

2) Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.

3) But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

4) I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.

5) I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me."

One translation of verse 5 says, "I lie down and sleep; knowing I shall wake again, because the Lord sustains me".

Verse 6, "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about.

7) Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheekbone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.

8) Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: thy blessing is upon thy people."

Catherine Marshall in '*Touching the Heart of God*' wrote about her friend Marge who had an interesting experience aboard a plane bound for Cleveland, waiting for takeoff.

Catherine says, "As she settled into her seat, Marge noticed a strange phenomenon. On one side of the aeroplane a sunset suffused the entire sky with glorious colour."

"But out of the window next to her seat, all Marge could see was a sky dark and threatening, with no sign of the sunset".

"As the plane's engines began to roar, a gentle Voice spoke within her. Beneath the roar and thrust of the takeoff this voice seemed to murmur, 'You have noticed the windows. Your life, too, will contain some

happy, beautiful times, but also some dark shadows. Here's a lesson I want to teach you to save you much heartache and allow you to abide in Me with continual peace and joy."

She goes on to share what this voice seemed to say: "You see, it doesn't matter which window you look through; this plane is still going to Cleveland. So it is in your life. You have a choice. You can dwell on the gloomy picture."

"Or you can focus on the bright things and leave the dark, ominous situations to Me. I alone can handle them anyway. And the final destination is not influenced by what you see or feel along the way. Learn this, act on it and you will be released, able to experience the 'peace that passes understanding'."

We earlier read Psalm 4 that has a parallel theme to Psalm 3.

Psalm 4 was written on a similar (or perhaps even the same) occasion when David was being slandered by his enemies.

He was being falsely accused, persecuted verbally.

Yet at the end of Psalm 4 David was able to say in verse 8, "I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."

How was David able to sleep in the midst of pain and trouble?

Consulting God

Firstly, God was consulted - Psalm 4:1, you may recall, says, "Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer."

The first thing we should do when we have a problem is to consult our God. Billy Graham is known to have said, "Heaven is full of answers to prayers for which no one ever bothered to ask".

I read a while back about a roomful of doctors eating together.

One doctor got up from the table, left the room, and in minutes he was dead.

A morsel of food had lodged in his windpipe, and so he choked to death.

The tragedy of this incident is heightened by the fact that probably any one of those doctors could have performed the Heimlich Manoeuvre or, if need be, a tracheotomy to restore his breathing.

But they did not know anything was wrong, as he did not tell them. He just got up and left. And so he died.

Writer Max De Pree said, "Our culture sees asking for help as a sign of weakness, but it's not. It's a sign of strength."

Bruce N. Cameron, an American Law Professor, tells a story about a client of his, a bricklayer, who needed help but wouldn't ask for it.

The bricklayer had just finished building the chimney of a fireplace and he had all of these extra bricks. So, instead of asking for help, he did what you and I do so often, he decided to use his head.

He rigged up this block-and-tackle at the top of the chimney, and used it to hoist this 40-pound barrel up to the top of the roof.

He tied the rope securely to the ground, climbed up the roof and started loading the barrel with bricks.

He didn't need any help.

When he got about 150 pounds of bricks in this 40-pound barrel, he got down to untie the rope and lower his bricks. He didn't need any help.

For some of us this might have worked. But, this fellow only weighed 140 pounds.

The accident report turned in to his insurance company states that as he was going up, he met the barrel on its way down. That is how he fractured his collarbone.

According to the accident report, he broke his finger when his hand got jammed in the pulley at the top.

Not to worry however, about him being stuck up there, because when the barrel hit the ground, it was moving pretty fast and the bottom broke out of the barrel, letting all the bricks out. He didn't need any help.

Physics dictated that the barrel that now weighed only 40 pounds was on its way up.

The accident report indicates that he met the barrel on his way down. That is how he scraped up his

arm.

The report also indicates that when he hit the bricks he broke his foot.

This caused him, to let go of the rope. He didn't need any help.

Neither did the barrel. According to the accident report, it was a perfect bull's-eye.

His client needed help but wouldn't ask for it.

David, however, consulted his God, remembering that God had helped him in times past.

One translation says, "You gave me room when I was in distress".

Some people may not like history, but it is good remember God's past deliverance.

We will not fear the future if we remember how the Lord has protected us in the past.

David was seeking God's mercy to calm his heart and God's ear to hear his prayer and calm his mind.

Confronting Enemies

So God was consulted and secondly, enemies were confronted.

(Psalms 4:2-5) "O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah.

3) But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto him.

4) Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.

5) Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord."

Have you ever talked to someone who couldn't hear you? David appears to be confronting his enemies from a distance during his time of meditation.

By doing this he is helping himself to deal with the hurt and to make his own thinking clear.

Also, what was true for his enemies was true for David as well.

Psalm 4:2-5 contains an appeal, an assurance and some advice.

Psalm 4:2 - An **appeal** - "How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?" In his meditation, David appeals to his enemies, asking how long they were going to turn glory into shame and how long they were going love vanity and seek after falsehood.

Psalm 4:3 - An **assurance** - "Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him." David knew that God set apart Godly men for Himself. Because David believed that God regarded him as Godly, he was convinced that God would hear him.

Psalm 4:4-5 - We've had the appeal, seen the assurance and now we read the **advice** - "In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord."

David advised his enemies to stand in awe in the fear of God, and to meditate or commune with their hearts.

The more a person respects God and thinks clearly, the more he will turn to God.

David also advised his enemies to offer the right sacrifices, meaning to get their priorities right, and to put their trust in the Lord.

Henri J.M. Nouwen wrote in the New Oxford Review, "A life is like a day; it goes by so fast. If I am so careless with my days, how can I be careful with my life?"

"I know that somehow I have not fully come to believe that urgent things can wait while I attend to what is truly important."

"It finally boils down to a question of deep and strong conviction."

"Once I am truly convinced that preparing the heart is more important than preparing the Christmas tree, I will be a lot less frustrated at the end of a day".

This is what it means to offer the right sacrifices.

Benjamin Franklin wrote, "Fatigue is the best pillow".

Perhaps he was thinking of Ecclesiastes 5:12, "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not

suffer him to sleep."

"Do we have our priorities right?"

Ray Tiemann asked us to consider this when he wrote: "It was a 99-degree September day in San Antonio, when a 10 month-old baby girl was accidentally locked inside a parked car by her aunt."

"Frantically the mother and aunt ran around the car in near hysteria, while a neighbour attempted to unlock the car with a clothes hanger. Soon the infant was turning purple and had foam on her mouth".

"It had become a life-or-death situation when Fred Arriola, a [truck] driver, arrived on the scene."

"He grabbed a hammer and smashed the back window of the car to set her free. Was he heralded a hero?"

"He said, 'The lady was mad at me because I broke the window. I just thought, What's more important? The baby or the window?'"

"Sometimes priorities get out of order, and a Fred Arriola reminds us what's important."

Comforting David

In Psalm 4, God was consulted, enemies were confronted, and thirdly, David was comforted.

(Psalms 4:6-8) "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.
7) Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.
8) I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety."

Psalm 4:6 - "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. "

Although many others were being negative, David called on the Lord to smile on him.

Psalm 4:7 - "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."

David was joyful in the Lord even when times were bad.

Psalm 4:8 - "I will both lay me down in peace,

and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety."

David trusted the Lord; therefore he could sleep in heavenly peace.

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Chapter 4. Putting it into Practice

Philippians 4:4-7 says, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

2) Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

3) Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

4) And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus".

The New International Version says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus".

This passage in Philippians can be divided into four basic stages.

We are given a **principle**: Rejoice always. We are given a **premise**: Stop worrying. We are given a **practice**: Start praying. And we are given a **promise**: Peace.

The promise is there and available, but we must follow the first three steps in order for the fourth to occur.

We must be willing to rejoice, no matter what.

Then we must stop worrying and start praying if we are to begin receiving God's peace.

Edward Young (1683-1765) wrote, "Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep".

Proverbs 6:10, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:"

In 2007 I received an email from Miss Rose Beard (Now Mrs Dean).

This is what she wrote, "I had always heard of the '*Peace that passes all understanding*', but now I have experienced it". (Philippians 4:7, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.")

"Just a little over a month ago I found out that I had breast cancer. I was shocked at first at the word cancer, but then peace settled in. I was not worried."

"One time I got a little scared as I was waiting for the surgery, but I gave it to Jesus, and the fear went away almost immediately."

"On the day of my mastectomy I was not afraid because I knew the Great Physician was with me."

"I had been told I would not be able to use my arm after the surgery. The first thing I did after I got to my room was put my arm behind my head by reflex."

"It didn't hurt. I took no pain medication after I left the recovery room because I didn't need them."

"The staff at the Hospital were amazed at my recovery, but I knew why, it was Jesus."

"My surgery was on Friday, I went home on Saturday and to Church on Sunday so I could praise and thank God for what he had done for me."

"My pathology tests came back that the surrounding tissue was not involved and it was not in the lymph nodes. I will see an oncologist in about 10

days but I am still not worried."

"'My side is a little sore, but that is to be expected after major surgery. Praise God."

Chapter 5: The Benefits

A farmer advertised for men to work on his farm but received only one applicant, an eighteen-year-old boy who was asked, "Can you run a tractor?"

"No, Sir," replied the youth.

"Can you handle a milking machine?"

"No, sir I've never worked with one."

After several more questions, all with negative answers, the farmer said, "Well, what can you do, young man?"

And he answered, "I can sleep when the wind blows."

The farmer didn't understand, but neither did he press for an explanation. He needed help so badly that he gave the job to the young man.

It was not many days afterward that a storm came up in the middle of the night. The wind began to blow, accompanied by thunder and lightning and rain.

The farmer was awakened and ran to the room where the young man was sleeping. There, just as he had said, he was sleeping through the storm.

Rather than trying to waken the youth, the farmer himself ran out to the barn to check on the animals and the equipment.

He found the doors to the barn tightly shut and bolted. The animals were in their shelters, properly secured.

Then he remembered the pile of straw that the wind would be blowing in all directions, but he found it had been covered with canvas and tied down. Everything was secure.

On the way back to the house the farmer remembered what the young man had told him: "I can sleep when the wind blows." And he understood.

Philippians 4:4-9, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

5) Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

6) Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your

requests be made known unto God.

7) And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

8) Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

9) Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you."

Do we have the confidence to live through life's storms knowing that we are secure with God?

If so, we can sleep when the wind and other trouble blows and know that the peace of God, which passes *(or should I say, surpasses)* all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus".

Paul tells us not to sleep as others do.

1 Thessalonians 5:6-11, "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

7) For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and

they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8) But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

9) For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10) Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11) Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do".

Verse 16-23, "Rejoice evermore.

17) Pray without ceasing.

18) In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

19) Quench not the Spirit.

20) Despise not prophesyings.

21) Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

22) Abstain from all appearance of evil.

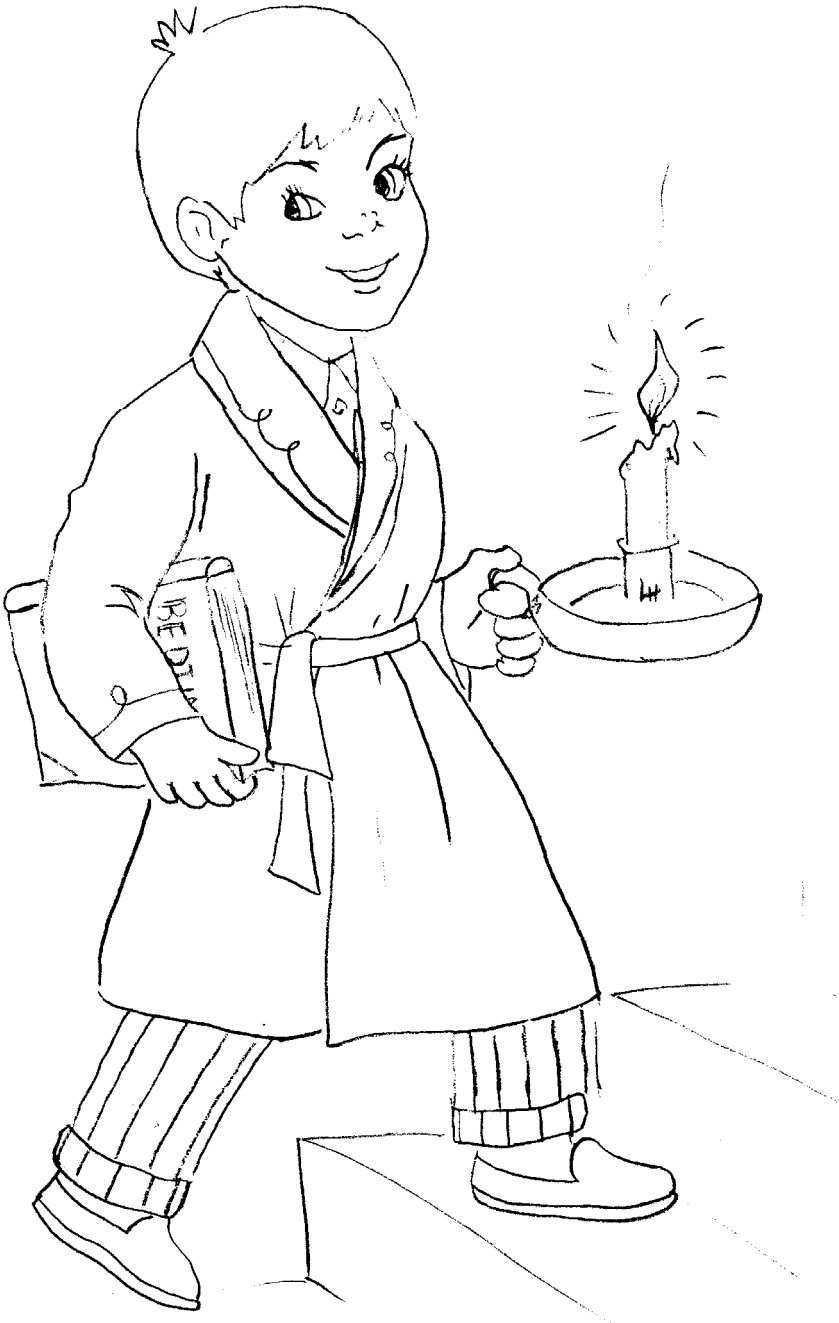
23) And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And verse 28, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) wrote, "Sleep recreates. The Bible indicates that sleep is not meant only for the recuperation of a man's body, but that there is a tremendous furtherance of spiritual and moral life during sleep."

"Sleep is God's celestial nurse who croons away our consciousness, and God deals with the unconscious life of the soul in places where only he and his angels have charge."

"As you retire to rest, give your soul and God a time together, and commit your life to God with a conscious peace for the hours of sleep, and deep and profound developments will go on in spirit, soul, and body by the kind creating hand of our God".



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